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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTEVIDEO 000619

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INL FOR DEBORAH HOOKER

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SUBJECT: Largest Drug Seizure in Uruguayan History

REF: MONTEVIDEO 402; MONTEVIDEO 23

CLASSIFIED BY: Robin Matthewman, Charge d'Affaires, Department of  
State, EXEC; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

#### Summary

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¶1. (C) On October 15, Uruguayan officials seized 2.174 kilos of cocaine valued at over 108 million USD on a yacht just west of Montevideo. This seizure is the largest narcotic bust of its type in the history of Uruguay and the region. The seizure is the result of a successful international investigation which included cooperation of Serbian and Argentine police and the Argentine and Uruguayan Coastguard under DEA guidance. The seizure is a boon for the Uruguayan Anti-Drug Secretariat, because it highlights progressing capacity for interagency coordination. In Uruguay, this is the first concrete evidence of a potentially growing criminal element of Eastern European origin that is active in the region. End Summary.

#### Successful Coordination Pays Off

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¶2. (C) GOU involvement in this lengthy and ongoing international case began approximately 24 hours before the seizure, when Argentine authorities reached out to their Uruguayan counterparts in search of a suspicious yacht that couldn't be found in Argentine waters. GOU awareness of suspicious activity, however, started over a month earlier when the Uruguayan Coast Guard started surveillance on a yacht that had been purchased in cash by an Eastern European. Aware that this yacht could be tied to money laundering or other illegal activity, Uruguayan authorities had kept watch on the yacht and knew its location when called on. With the information provided by the DEA, the Uruguayan Counternarcotics Police were able to get a search warrant to board the yacht, facilitating the Coast Guard's seizure of over 2 metric tons of cocaine.

¶3. (C) The cocaine was en route to Europe and was being transported via the yacht to a ship on the high seas. The yacht had already made one journey out to the ship (it is unknown if any illegal substance was transferred on board), but because of stormy weather, returned to land and was detoured to Uruguay.

¶4. (C) One Eastern European traveling with a Croatian passport was arrested in connection to the crime. Four other

individuals of Eastern European descent are known to have been involved, but have not been located in Uruguay. One Uruguayan notary was arrested but released. The origin of the cocaine remains unknown, though investigations to determine such are underway. Investigators are still searching for an additional 500 kilograms that was suspected to be in the original shipment.

#### Interagency and International Cooperation

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15. (C) This case demonstrates successful cooperation with in Uruguay, in the region, and internationally. The seizure is the first big victory for the Uruguayan National Anti-Drug Plan (Ref A) launched in June 2009. This plan designates the Counternarcotics Police as the lead investigators in all narcotics-related cases, reassigning some of the jurisdiction of other law enforcement agencies in an effort to become more efficient at combating trafficking. The Specialized Courts for Organized Crime, enacted in January 2009, are another tool recently developed to help professionalize Uruguay's law enforcement apparatus (Ref B). There are two judges and two federal prosecutors assigned to the Specialized Courts which work narcotics, money laundering, corruption, trafficking in persons, and other related cases. These efforts to coordinate law enforcement are improving Uruguayan authorities' ability to discourage sophisticated crime networks from setting up shop in Uruguay.

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